

MEMO

Date: November 21, 2005
To: Regional Comprehensive Plan Task Force
From: Jessica Kirchner, Associate Regional Planner
Subject: Regional Comprehensive Plan Open Space and Habitat Chapter

SUMMARY

The Regional Comprehensive Plan Task Force, at its October 24 meeting, discussed the approach and scope for the planned Open Space and Habitat Chapter. In particular, the Task Force members and other meeting participants identified potential outcomes and regional goals that could be specified within the chapter, and form a focus for staff activities. The Task Force approved a report to the Energy and Environment Committee, but also requested that staff present a revised chapter scope and approach for further review by the Task Force. This report is in response to that request.

BACKGROUND

The Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP) is intended to serve as a useful tool implementing policies of the Regional Council. The approach for the overall development of the plan calls for a special emphasis on the Open Space and Habitat Chapter for the following reasons:

- The region's adopted 2% Strategy calls for increased urban development and growth in key strategic areas, while broadly supporting sustainability concepts and environmental protection. The region needs a well-articulated open space protection strategy to balance its urbanization strategy.
- There has been substantial planning work done within the region on open space and habitat issues, particularly at the county level, but little coordination among counties, at the regional scale, or between the region and the State.
- The State Resource Agencies has expressed an interest in pursuing a coordinated open space and habitat planning process with SCAG.
- Establishing a reliable, workable open space protection system is a key to establishing alternative environmental review procedures under State law.

As such, the RCP Task Force held an extended discussion on potential goals and outcomes for the RCP Open Space and Habitat Chapter. The results of that discussion are recorded in the attached revised scope and approach for the chapter.

Given concurrence from the Task Force and the EEC at the stage, SCAG staff will proceed to develop a draft chapter. Specific activities to be pursued are described in detail in the attachment. Particularly of note are the following:

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- The formation of a working group consisting of stakeholders
- The retention of a consultant to develop a comprehensive open space protection system
- Collaboration with State agencies on an iterative planning process
- Review of existing County level open space and habitat plans.

Staff will give periodic updates to the Task Force and anticipates presenting a draft chapter for consideration within 12 months.

Attachment: Chapter Scope and Approach



This draft Open Space and Habitat chapter approach, as presented, is preliminary and has not been subject to formal approval of the SCAG Regional Council or any Committee. The draft is based on the discussions of the RCP Task Force and is being made available at this time for information and for suggestions.

Preliminary Draft Scope and Approach for the Regional Comprehensive Plan: Open Space and Habitat Chapter

Develop a vision for open space preservation for Southern California

Action: Develop regional level analyses with a consistent look and uniform procedures and mitigation. This would provide a template that could be easily implemented at the local level.

Activities:

1. SCAG will consult with agencies, stakeholders and the task force, to create an open space vision for the region.
2. Staff will incorporate SCAG's Growth Vision/2% Strategy to help create a regional open space vision.

Outcomes

- a. The chapter will specify a number of acres that should be preserved and target specific areas for preservation.
- b. The regional vision will serve as a catalyst to subsequent work.

Identify suggested amount and type of parkland within urban settings

Action: The Open Space and Habitat chapter will attempt to develop measures of parkland and access appropriate for Southern California and delineate action steps to increase access to parks and open space for all Southern California residents.

Activities:

3. Staff will meet with stakeholders to ascertain park needs at the regional level.
4. Staff will include a discussion of agricultural lands and their importance to the region

Outcomes:

- a. Through consultation with stakeholders, staff will develop "parks to people" ratios based on SCAG's Growth Vision/2% Strategy

Identify measures to mitigate habitat impacts of transportation projects

Action: The Open Space and Habitat chapter will examine wildlife crossings at the regional level, building on the work done in Ventura County, and apply the knowledge gained at a regional scale. This analysis will include identification of important and restricted wildlife corridors to preserve habitat connectivity.

Activities:

5. Staff will also explore impacts to fisheries, marine life and waterways
6. Staff will incorporate regional wildlife corridors analysis into the open space chapter.

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7. Staff will include a discussion of the benefits of parks/open space/natural areas on air quality and water quality.

Outcomes:

- a. Staff will develop habitat goals, including no net reduction due to development in species populations.
- b. Staff will identify key wildlife corridors for the region.

Identify financial mechanisms to accrue funding for open space protection

Action: A consultant is expected to be retained for tasks including (but not limited to) securing open space resources, forming a pool of funding for mitigation of impacts of new development, and providing discretionary incentive funding to cities and counties for adopting policies supportive of a regional growth strategy developing infrastructure

Activities:

8. Explore cumulative impacts due to the loss of open space for the region such as degradation of air and water quality.
9. Evaluate the “hidden” costs of the loss of open space – attempt to ascertain the true value of open space/natural areas
10. Explore alternative funding mechanisms for open space protection and preservation.

Outcomes:

- a. With the help of a consultant, staff will attempt to find more effective tools and monetary incentives to achieve open space goals.
- b. As a result, there will be better understanding of the cumulative impacts and “real” cost of loss of open space and natural areas.

Analyze existing state plans for open space, habitat, and parks. Recommend for future planning efforts based on consistency with the region’s desired outcomes

Action: The California Resources Agency has agreed, in concept, to collaborate on the chapter. Evaluation at the regional level will enable communities to see what has been done elsewhere. In addition, this process will be proactive rather than reactive (relying on the endangered species acts) and will facilitate broad community participation. This will help develop an iterative process whereby regional priorities influence other plans and vice versa.

Activities:

11. Staff will coordinate with the Resources Agency staff to ensure compliance with the Endangered Species Act.

Outcomes:

- a. Through the consultation process SCAG will help establish a consistent coordinated planning throughout the region.

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Develop open space and habitat planning tools and best practices to be implemented at the local level

Action: Recognizing the benefits of parks are experienced at the local level, the open space and habitat chapter will include a “toolkit” for local governments who want to increase park space within their jurisdictions.

Activities:

12. Distinguish between parks (typically in developed areas) and natural areas (typically in non-developed areas).
13. SCAG will provide technical assistance to locals for linking parklands.
14. SCAG will share best practices uncovered during the process to educate locals on available tools.

Outcomes:

- a. SCAG will develop specific guidance on achieving open space goals with optional implementation.